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ABSTRACT

Assertive Discipline is an outgrowth of Canter and Associates' professional efforts in both working directly with children with behavior problems and consulting with teachers on how to deal effectively with such children. Assertive Discipline is an in-depth approach to classroom and school discipline. Lee and Marlene Canter first published "Assertive Discipline: A Take Charge Approach for Today's Educator" in 1976. Over the past decade, Canter and Associates have trained over 500,000 teachers in this competency-based approach to classroom management. Despite Assertive Discipline's popularity with teachers and its acceptance by school districts across the nation, there are educators who express concerns and doubts about the approach and its effectiveness. Some of those educators have asked the following questions: "Does Assertive Discipline have a sound research base?" and "Has Assertive Discipline been researched as to its effectiveness?" This article is intended to answer those questions. (Author/JD)

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ASSERTIVE DISCIPLINE AND RESEARCH

Assertive discipline is an outgrowth of Canter and Associates' professional efforts in both working directly with children with behavior problems and consulting with teachers on how to deal effectively with such children. Assertive Discipline is an in-depth approach to classroom and school discipline. Lee and Marlene Canter first published Assertive Discipline: A Take Charge Approach for Today's Educator in 1976, and it now is in its 13th printing.[1] Over the past decade, Canter and Associates have trained over 500,000 teachers in this competency-based approach to classroom management. Despite Assertive Discipline's popularity with teachers and its acceptance by school districts across the nation, there are educators who express concerns and doubts about the approach and its effectiveness. Some of those educators have asked the following questions: "Does Assertive Discipline have a sound research base?" and "Has Assertive Discipline been researched as to its effectiveness?" This article is intended to answer those questions.

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A Research Basis for Assertive Discipline

Assertive Discipline is a competency-based program, and by examining each competency a determination can be made as to the research background. The first competency and the backbone of Assertive Discipline is the need for the teacher to exhibit assertive behavior. This competency resulted primarily from exposure to the theoretical and practical aspects of assertion training. Assertion training is a behavioristic approach to counseling and human relations training according to Rimm and Masters.[2] The roots of assertion training may be traced back to Salter's Conditioned Reflex Therapy,[3] however Wolpe's model and its later revisions constitute assertive training as it is known today.[4] The use of assertion training skills enables individuals to stand up more effectively for their wants and feelings, while at the same time not abusing the rights of others, according to Lange and Jakubowski.[5] According to Canter, professionals have successfully used assertion training skills in clinical practice to assist a wide spectrum of individuals including businessmen, adolescents, housewives, patients in hospitals, and overwhelmed parents.[6]

Assertiveness training can also be used effectively with teachers. DeCharms claims that prospective teachers can become more like "origins" and less like "pawns" as a result of assertion training.[7] De Charms describes "origins" as being persons who feel in charge of their lives and believe that they have personal causation; that is, they feel they are the origin of their own behavior. "Pawns" on the other hand, feel little or no control over their destiny, blame luck or fate for their outcome, and fail to take responsibility for their mistakes or credit for their successes. DeCharms found that it was possible to create behavior in people that was more origin-like through experiences in which individuals planned

for their own successful achievement of goals and focused on creating their own images of success.[8]

Hoffman reported that in a follow-up survey of teachers who completed a graduate level class, Assertiveness for Teachers, and were asked, "Would you consider assertion training to be a useful requirement for prospective teachers?" 93% responded yes; 7% no.[9]

Researchers have found that assertion training based upon behavioral research effectively increases the incidence of assertive behavior.[10]

Another major part of the Assertive Discipline program is the development of a discipline plan. This discipline plan involves the following competencies: the establishment of classroom rules, the enforcement of negative consequences when those rules are broken, and the use of positive reinforcement whenever students behave properly.

The process of establishing rules is one in which the teacher sets limits by telling the student what is expected of him or her, and why. The literature provides strong support for the notion that the effective teacher is one who establishes reasonable, definable, clearly understood rules. Hair and others emphasized letting the students know the teachers' expectations and routines and the students' responsibilities.[11] Emmer and Evertson found that effective managers clearly laid out expectations on the first day of class and that the best teachers were observed explicitly teaching their rules early in the year.[12] A review of the literature reveals several studies that provide empirical evidence concerning the effectiveness of this strategy.[13]

Weber stated that studies by Kounin, Brophy, Evertson, and others indicate that the effective teacher acted to stop behavior problems quickly and did not simply wait for the behavior to be extinguished through

lack of positive reinforcement.[14] Hair and others emphasized consistency in the use of punishments.[15] Emmer and Evertson found that during the first three weeks of the school year, effective managers began a pattern of stopping misbehaviors quickly, of making the consequences of behavior clear, and of applying rules consistently.[16]

Positive reinforcement is a process in which a stimulus that, when presented as a consequence of response, "results in an increase or maintenance of that response."[17] "The behavior modification literature contains many studies attesting to the effect of positive reinforcement; clearly, it is a powerful strategy for modifying and maintaining student behavior," according to Weber.[18]

Research Validating the Effectiveness of Assertive Discipline

Assertive Discipline has been in use now for just over a decade, and research only recently has begun to emerge. During the past few years a number of studies have been conducted, and more are being undertaken on a regular basis.

A number of these studies have focused on the teacher. Webb conducted a study of 141 professional staff members trained in Assertive Discipline. Of those educators, 85.8% liked Assertive Discipline as a plan, and 81.55% thought that student behavior had improved because of Assertive Discipline.[19] Allen surveyed the staff of a junior high school, and the survey revealed that 91.4% felt that Assertive Discipline had a positive effect in their classroom, and 98.5% thought that Assertive Discipline had a positive effect on the school as a whole.[20] Bauer stated that ninth-grade teachers in the school using Assertive Discipline reported greater satisfaction with their roles in the classroom compared to teachers from a school using various models of classroom discipline.[21] Henderson's findings suggest that, within the same school system, elementary school classroom teachers trained in and implementing Assertive Discipline during one academic year displayed significant positive differences with regard to focus of control, pupil control ideology, and higher mean scores with respect to self-concept and assertive teacher personality characteristics than elementary school classroom teachers not trained in or implementing the Assertive Discipline program.[22]

Several studies have examined preservice teachers or student teachers and the effectiveness of Assertive Discipline training. Smith found that those student teachers trained were rated higher by

their supervising teachers as being assertive and score higher in classroom management.[23] Barrett and Curtis surveyed 248 student teachers trained in Assertive Discipline, 288 students not trained in Assertive Discipline, and their university supervisors and supervising teachers. Student teachers trained in Assertive Discipline rated their preparation for employing appropriate techniques of classroom discipline significantly higher than did those student teachers not formally trained. University supervisors and supervising teachers rated the student teachers who received Assertive Discipline training significantly higher in applying positive discipline techniques than those not formally trained.[24]

Ward concluded that the Assertive Discipline program proved significantly effective in reducing student disruptions. During a six period day, Ward found that there was a mean of 17.09 disruptions per 100 students per day before training and a mean of 10.44 disruptions after training.[25]

The use of Assertive Discipline by teachers also has proven to be an effective means of increasing on-task behavior of students. McCormack examined 36 classrooms with 687 students and found that in the 18 classrooms where Assertive Discipline was used, the students were off-task 5% of the time observed.[26]

Allen found in a study of seventh and eigth-grade students that there was a significant decrease in the number of referrals after the implementation of Assertive Discipline. He found that the annual number of referrals decreased by 31.8% since the implementation of Assertive Discipline.[27]

McDaniel found that Assertive Discipline programs throughout Los Angeles County are viewed by principals as always or usually being

effective in 91% of the schools and that highly effective Assertive Discipline programs were more likely to be enacted on a schoolwide than a partial basis.[28]

Mandlebaum concluded from her study that the Assertive Discipline program is an effective and practical behavior management strategy that can yield socially valid outcomes.[29] Examples of some of those socially valid outcomes were found by Parker. She found that older students in the secondary grades generally benefited from the program in terms of developing self-esteem and school morale.[30]

Conclusion

Although Assertive Discipline is a competency-based program, those competencies are based upon sound research. By combining a program developed both from the theoretical and practical aspects of assertion training with competencies grounded in effective teaching techniques as researched by Emmer, Evertson, Kounin, Brophy, Madsen and Madsen, and others, Canter has created a model that allows teachers to teach and students to learn.

Based upon research conducted at this early stage, Assertive Discipline has proven to be effective. Both teachers and student teachers perceive Assertive Discipline as an effective management technique. It has been proven beneficial in both decreasing the number of referrals and as an effective means to increase on-task behavior of students. Assertive Discipline also has proven significantly effective in reducing student disruptions.

Students have been found to benefit from the program it terms of developing self-esteem and school morale, and several studies have concluded that Assertive Discipline is an effective and practical

behavior management strategy that can yield socially valid outcomes.

Researchers need to continue to examine Assertive Discipline as there are a number of variables that invite examination. The popularity of Assertive Discipline may well continue, and more teachers will be trained because of the practicality of the program, but educators also need to be aware of and examine current research to determine the effectiveness of this popular behavior management strategy.

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